

## **GOVERNOR O'MALLEY ANNOUNCES NEW CITIZEN OYSTER-GROWING**

### **PROGRAM, MARYLAND OYSTER PLANTING RECORD**

*State and Partners Plant Nearly One-Half Billion Oysters in 2008; Create Stewardship Project to Grow Out One Million Young Oysters over the Next Year*

**EASTON, MD (September 24, 2008)** — Governor Martin O'Malley today kicked off a new partnership aimed at increasing citizen involvement in oyster restoration, and announced that Maryland has planted more than 485 million oysters in the Chesapeake Bay this year, a one-year record. The Governor was joined by citizens, staff and partners as he placed the first stewardship cages at the home of Hope and Anthony Harrington along the Tred Avon River.

"The irreplaceable value and role of oysters in our Bay gives rise to the need for escalating restoration efforts. I'm very proud that Maryland's work with the Oyster Recover Partnership and our other key partners has resulted in an historic planting effort this year," said Governor O'Malley. "We recognize each of us must play a role to help re-establish the healthy oyster populations that are critical to the Bay's ecology, our culture and our economy. To build on this year's planting success, we are embarking on a pilot project to engage waterfront property owners as caretakers of young oysters during their first year of life."

Because of oysters' unique filtering abilities and the vital habitat for aquatic life they help create, Maryland and its partners continue to enhance and improve large-scale native oyster restoration efforts. Increased hatchery capacity at the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science, Horn Point facility in Cambridge has enabled more than 1.4 billion oysters to be planted since 2000 on 1,100 acres of once-productive oyster reefs.

"Whether there are 1,000 oysters growing in an oyster cage or 100 million oysters being planted in the Choptank River, Oysters are critical to the Bay's long-term recovery," said Oyster Recovery Partnership Chairman Dr. Torrey C. Brown. "The strong leadership of Governor O'Malley and Department of Natural Resources Secretary John Griffin on this issue, along with the early and continuing support of Senator Barbara Mikulski, have enabled the partners to build both in-the-water and on-the-ground infrastructure and production capacity that we enjoy today."

In its pilot stage, *Marylanders Grow Oysters... Citizens working to restore the Chesapeake Bay*, is inviting Talbot County waterfront property owners along the Tred Avon River, a tributary of the Choptank River, to grow oysters from their pier using cages built by inmates at the Eastern Correctional Institution, and spat provided by the partnership.

The project is designed to inspire more Marylanders do what they can in their own lives and workplaces to protect and restore the Chesapeake Bay and the rivers that feed into it.

"My husband and I are more than pleased to be part of this new State initiative to restore a healthy oyster population and, ultimately, the health of the Bay," said Hope Harrington, the first homeowner to enroll in the program. "Active citizen involvement in this project is the key element to its success. We have widened the buffers on our shoreline to act as filters, planted a native grass and wildflower meadow to create habitat, have applied to the State for an osprey nesting platform and feel very fortunate to now be part of this terrific oyster restoration project. We hope very much that our neighbors along the Tred Avon will join us."

The partnership hopes to enlist 250 homeowners to place 4 oyster cages each off their piers by the end of October. After a 9 to 12 month growing period, the oysters will be planted on a protected sanctuary in the Tred Avon River.

“We appreciate the willingness of homeowners who’ve already signed up to allow their pier to serve as a temporary home and provide the protection needed to give these young oysters an better chance for early survival and maximize their ecological contribution to the Bay,” said DNR Secretary John R. Griffin. “We hope that more residents along the Tred Avon River waterfront will join this effort to rejuvenate aquatic life in the river and Chesapeake Bay.”

Established by Governor O’Malley, the *Marylanders Grow Oysters* project, is a cooperative effort of concerned citizens, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science, Talbot County, and the Oyster Recovery Partnership. The oyster cages were constructed by inmates under the supervision of the Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services. The Chesapeake Bay Trust provided funding for the initiative.

“This project gave inmates meaningful work that they are truly be proud of, knowing that the community and Chesapeake Bay are benefiting from their work,” said DPSCS Secretary Gary Maynard.

Additional oyster restoration efforts underway in Maryland include creating structured habitat to enhance oyster reproduction; planting hatchery produced oysters on existing and historical oyster bars; prohibiting oyster harvest in some areas; and regulating the fishery to limit the number of oysters harvested annually. For more information about *Marylanders Grow Oysters* visit [www.dnr.maryland.gov/oysterproject](http://www.dnr.maryland.gov/oysterproject).

In the first two years of his Administration, Governor O’Malley strengthened Maryland’s critical areas law to ensure more adequate protection of the most environmentally sensitive and significant lands within Maryland’s Chesapeake and Coastal Bays watersheds and established BayStat to make the State’s Bay restoration and protection more efficient and effective.

Additionally, the O’Malley/Brown Administration coordinated with Virginia Governor Kaine to rebuild the Chesapeake Bay’s beleaguered blue crab population by reducing the harvest of ecologically valuable female blue crabs by 34 percent in 2008. Just yesterday, U.S. Secretary of Commerce Carlos M. Gutierrez declared a federal fishery disaster for the Chesapeake Bay blue crab, enabling relief to reach watermen who have been affected by the declining blue crab population.

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